THE PULPIT

A SUNDAY SERMON BY THE REV. IRA W. HENDERSON, THE FAMOUS DIVINE.

Subject: Children.

Brooklyn, N. Y.—Preaching at the Irving Square Presbyterian Church, Hamburg avenue and Weirfield street, on the subject hereby, the pastor, Rev. Ira Wemmell Henderson, took as his text Matt. 18:3, "Little children." He said:

The Bible is a book for the child. I had almost said it is a children's book. It is written in the language of the child for the most part and the themes are so treated as almost entirely to be intelligible to youth. Its precepts are for them. Its admonitions to adults are importantly in the interest of childhood. Its counsels are largely to the young. Its history is fascinating when properly delivered to the young. Its stories are simply inspiring to the minds and hearts of the child. Its invitation is to the child in years and to the childlike in heart alike.

The greatest single character study in the Bible has to deal was and is superlatively interested in the child. For whatever else Jesus was, He was supremely interested in the child. He was supremely, unmistakably philosophical in His attitude toward them, pre-eminently conscious of their ultimate value. He loved them as only the Master Parents of all can love our children more than we can ever love them. For He saw in the child whom He took to His knee the man of the future. For He saw in childhood more than we possible students after a fashion of children as we. We saw the child. He saw the child's possibilities for eternal relationship of the heirs of the child to the eternal kingdom of Almighty God. And He saw the child's possibilities for the world's redemption as plain though we have, with all our wisdom and attainments in an age of unsurpassing scholarship and consecrated ability, been unable to see. And if we are to be true to Him we should have placed a high estimate upon the child. It is not at all wonderful that He should have placed a high estimation to children.

For the child is the most important and most promising as the most neglected and misunderstood factor in the world's possibilities. He is the hope of the race. He is the field of our largest expectations. He is the largest reason for the existence of good society. He is the clarity of the spiritual vision and life of the world is dependent upon him. Nothing is more promising—the spiritual alertness of every human soul, the saving of souls of our youth—than the awakening of the minds and souls of our youth to a proper conception of the moral and spiritual realities of the universe. He shall be indeed childish if he does not see that the greatest resistance of the plant fields without experienced and expert guidance. The moral training of the formative years of a child is a development of the spiritual nature, a spiritual training that we afford our children in their callowest youth is the training that will endure. Nothing can enrich a child's life like a wise, sympathetic, spiritual guidance, nothing in later life will be able to overthrow it. The moral and spiritual training of a child is the development of the child for the eternal ends.

It is not sufficient that we shall instruct our children. It is needful that we shall take care that they be not misled or made to stumble. It is idle to instruct, the while a scrupulous care ought to be regarded the pale of possibility for any person who is mentally, morally or physically unfitted for the duties of parentage to enter into the conjugal relations of wedlock. The State ought, and is under obligation, to provide for the future.

The Seed of Immortality.

And yet, under the guidance of the wisdom of God, and in fidelity to the decree of Jesus Christ, there is no more wonderful, as there is no more fruitful or sacred, field for study and research, than the life of humanity in the fashioning of the child. Is there a more eternally unselfish? God really is! And shall we be ashamed of the wonderworking, of the handicraft of deity? A woman should be ashamed not to know, a father should be ashamed to be ignorant of the eternal truth of God that the prenatal life of a child has more influence upon its character and condition, its physical, mental and spiritual endowment and possibilities than all the influences of after life combined can ever have. Knowing this we shall be more careful not to curse or curse the future of our children by the sins of the fathers and the trials of this earthly pilgrimage, trusting to the influences of the after life to overshadow and to counteract the evil tendencies of the plant by the wisdom, quite ineradicable.

Children grossly neglect and they amply repay it. The Government spends good money and much of it to study crops and cows and sewers and builders and posts and ships. It spends generous appropriations to breed two ears of corn grow where one grew before, to eradicate lice on plants, to destroy the pests that destroy useful vegetables and pollinate the orchard. It teaches the horse breeder how to develop the horse and the farmer how scientifically to fatten and plant and till and harvest, and yet the multitudes of men know more about the fine points of a dog than they do about the points of a child and the principles of child culture. But with a delightful lack of proportion and of the propriety of things we give spasmodic, poorly supported scientific examination into the nature of the child, but we have never yet risen to the height of the nature of the child in any way to improve him. And so we pack them off to the mines or we pork them with the sweat shops, or we make them work too hard or too long or too early to understand them. The veterinarian for the dog that growls; for the child that is fretful and simply because he cannot understand and for the child, the lash. And simply because we do not get understanding of the troubles of the child, we punish him, so much as confession of total incapacity to know just what else to do. No two children are alike, even two of the same parentage. Why therefore should we expect that all of them be alike? No man would catalog a dachshund in the same class a bull terrier. Why, then, should we catalog children? Why should we not seek to differentiate their scholastic ability? Why group dull boys and bright together simply because they happen to be of an age? Why group boys and girls of diverse tastes in the same category? Why? Because we are either too impotent or too lazy to devise a better way.

Children should not only be studied, but they should have their rights maintained. Their personality should be preserved. Their personality should be conserved. No man should be permitted to steal their youth, no man should be permitted to make them old before their time. It is a long run to allow it. No man should be permitted to give them the taste for drink or to grant them the privilege of the saloon. No man should be permitted to sell them vile stuff which will ruin their bodies and destroy their souls. No by-pass business which will ruin their bodies and destroy their souls. No by-pass is an expedient and no private or political consideration should be tolerated. Unappropriate by-laws shall forever prevent them and the fullest possible development of the juvenile itself between them and the fullest possible development of their faculties. If we cannot have cow sheds without children damned, then let us go without them. If we cannot have windows without children being damned, then let us go without them. If we cannot have alleyways except at the expense of the soul-ruin years of the youth of America, then let us go naked. It were far better that a mill stone should be hung about our necks and that we should be drowned in the depths of the sea than that by any fault or consent of ours God's little ones should be deprived of the highest gifts of life and of heaven.

There is nothing more criminal than the ignorance of their physical beings that so many children have. Many a boy would be kept from the path that tends toward violence, many a girl whose life is wrecked or is being wrecked would be saved from the way that leadeth to destruction cast upon the rocks of wickedness if there were but the knowledge that is profitable, if a little careful, wholesome parental advice had been given to perdition, if a little careful, wholesome parental advice had been given upon the sacred operations of our physical beings. It is no wonder that on the many hells upon evil ways and who are to-day girls are doomed to the life that is worse than death when so many fathers and mothers, so many Christian fathers and mothers are so unreverently and so mistakenly, I had almost said so criminally, modest. For I know whereof I speak when I say that a child who falls to the floor in a fit, who falls to the ground from a failure or mother is gathered in a wholly vicious and ungodly manner or in the best and unconscious of unnecessary exercise.

Children should be instructed and inspired intellectually. The child is entitled to the best that the present knowledge of the world can do for it. It is for us to start the child where we have left off. All that precedes in simple and historic continuity—it is evolutionary, it is indicative, it is explanatory. But it should be only that. The less the retrogression our children make as years go on the more will be the advancement of the world, the faster make as years go on the more will be the progress of humanity toward the kingdom of Almighty God. But much as our children ought to be instructed physically and intellectually, they should not only require moral and spiritual guiding. For the intellectual, the moral and the spiritual are but the three departments of the social order depends upon a clean manhood and womanhood. The purity of life of the world is dependent upon the clarity of the spiritual vision and the spiritual alertness of every human soul. Nothing is more promising than the awakening of the minds and souls of our youth to a proper conception of the moral and spiritual realities of the universe. They shall be indeed childish if they do not see that the greatest resistance of the plant fields without experienced and expert guidance. The moral training of the formative years of a child a development of the spiritual nature, a spiritual training that we afford our children in their callowest youth is the training that will endure. Nothing can enrich a child's life like a wise, sympathetic, spiritual guidance, nothing in later life will be able to overthrow it. The moral and spiritual training of a child is the development of the child for the eternal ends.

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